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The Vision

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Pacing with quiet tread the garden path,
A sombre nun caressed her rosary.
The sunshine shed about her golden bands
And dappled shadows where the shrubbery grew.
The ivy-covered walls beside her path
Gave shelter to a host of happy birds.
The fountain tinkled softly and the sun
Made myriad jewels of the drops of spray;
While in the basin cool the fishes sped
Like golden arrows through the water fern.

A moment here she paused, as one by one
The ebon beads slipped through her childlike hands;
Then journeyed on past some quaint outdoor shrine
Where coldly sweet its marble saint looked down
From rocky niche beside the garden path
In quiet benediction on the nun.

She loved this garden with its holy calm;
The faint sweet perfume of its many flowers,
The glossy ivy o'er its walls festooned;
And thought while resting in its grateful shade
That if in all the world peace might be found,
'Twould be within the quiet cloister here.

But life today had seemed inadequate;
Its greatest mission only half fulfilled.
Some measure, though, there was of recompense;

Some hidden chord that thrilled to aching need,
Responsive to the touch of kindred pain,
Like some rude storm-swept harp the wind plays on.
The children sought her and the dumb things, too,
With wistful eyes invited sympathy.
For her the lilies of the cloister bloomed
And mothers brought their babes for her caress ;

Though Love had passed her way, with quiet mien,
She, knowing, watched him go. His journey led
Toward Beauty's shrine whereat he worshipped long.
Until her heart grown sick from hope deferred
Had turned to Heaven to seek surcease from pain.
And then the cloister door had closed behind
And Youth and Joy and Gladness were shut out ;
Nor had the Peace she sought within these walls
Yet come to soothe the soul of burning pain.

Renunciation! None but God above
Could know the price of self that she had paid ;
The anguished nights, the dawns of tuneless mirth
Made glad with lilt of bird and budding flower,
For all His creatures save herself alone !

The beads had all been told. With reverent hands
The rude dark cross to quivering lips was pressed ;
A prayer of anguish, yet so gently breathed
None save the flowers and her God could hear :
"Lord let Thy servant live henceforth for Thee ;
Take from her heart all earthborn thoughts and may
Her best endeavor be Thy ministry.
And if sometimes her erring mind should stray
To that dim past of human love and hope
Forgive, O Father! Let her be content

That 'Thy love fills her earthly father's place,
That of the tender mother Thou hast called
And that of him who found in her no grace.
And since in 'Thine own wisdom infinite,
Unornamented stands this house of clay
Illumine with Thy love its inner shrine
That all who pass may see its flame afar
And Heavenward guide their footsteps by its glow."

As prayed the nun, grew bright with sunset's fires
The windows of the grey cathedral near;
The haunting cadence of the litany
Stole softly out upon the golden calm;
Kyrie Eleison, Thy mercy Lord
Christe Eleison, prayer of human need!
The low sweet voices of the chanting nuns
Commingling with the organ's tender tones.
An instant pausing by the open door
Her heart athrill with Heaven's harmony,
She passed within, and having then fulfilled
The ritual of her vow's requirements,
Resumed her pilgrimage.

Each shrine in turn
Received the homage of the penitent;
Who bowed in grief o'er snowy replica
Of martyred saint all splashed with scarlet stain,
Dyed deeper by the redly westering sun.
As kneeling thus, crept through her consciousness
The knowledge of some passing miracle,
And looking upward to discern its source
A soft effulgence as of glory come
From Heaven was shining all around her.

There
Above St. Francis' Shrine a vision grew,
Full in the flame of sunset's crimson glow;

All tender rose and pearl and satin limbed,
All softly curved and radiant as a star,
Her draperies floating from her as a veil
Of parting cloud reveals the planet's light;
Upon her hair of gold was set a crown
Wherein unnumbered jewels softly gleamed;
Within her hand a single lily bloomed
Upon its slender stem. Around her shone
Heaven's light resplendent.

The meek nun gazed
In reverent awe, nor loved the vision less
That she of face was plain, with figure formed
Like some young boy that almost reached the gate
Of sturdy manhood. Yet somewhat redeemed
The plainness of her features, lustrous eyes
That lighted up and shone like misty stars
When she communed with God and He seemed near.
The vision faded leaving as it passed,
The exaltation of some lovely dream.
And bowing low beside the altar place
The nun sought answer at the Virgin's feet:
"O holy Mother! Whence this miracle
Appearing in exquisite comeliness,
Enhaloed in the glory of the saints,
And purity upholding in her hand?"

Thus as the gentle suppliant made her plea,
There wafted down upon the holy calm
A voice of melting sweetness, like far strains
Of Heavenly music that one sometimes hears
When half awakened in the silent night.
It seemed the blessed Virgin answer gave.
The heart of her who listened thrilled with awe,
And scarce could grasp the meaning of the words.

“For that thou hast been faithful God hath sent
The vision as a mirror to thy faith;
Thou here hath seen earth’s body cast aside,
Symbolic of the old life put away,
And in its place resplendent there has been
Reflected over sweet St. Francis’ shrine
As in God’s very mirror face to face
The glowing image of thy NEW BORN SOUL!



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